v.54, no. 5 (Oct 2003)

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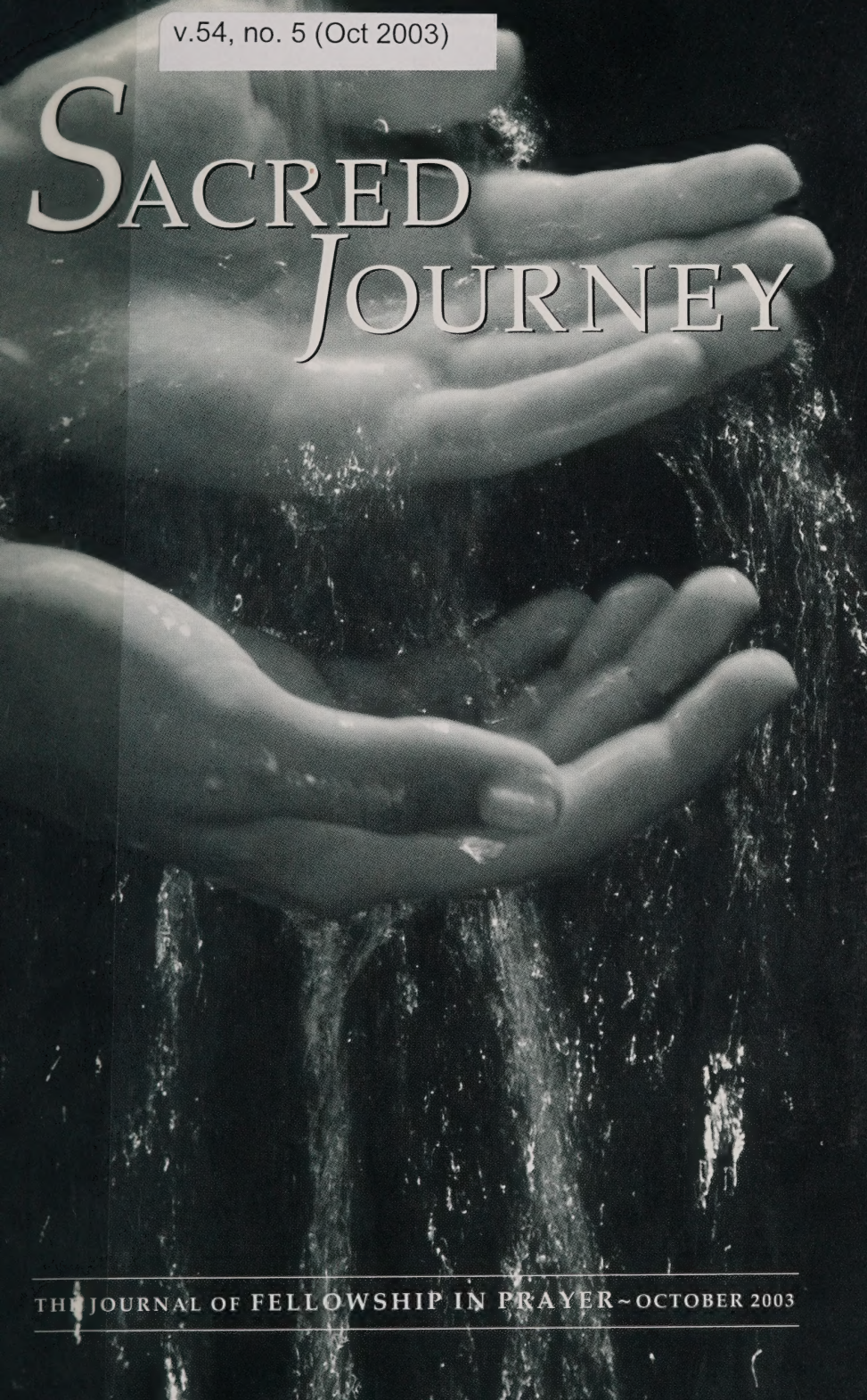

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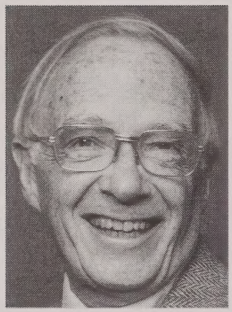
A WONDERFUL JOURNEY



Some twenty years ago, I started on a wonderful journey—at Fellowship in Prayer. As the president and executive director, my challenge has been to bring you the beliefs and, most of all, the experiences of the whole world of spiritual seekers as they traveled on their journey toward God. Your letters and the countless people I've shared experiences with on my trips, at the two major conferences we have offered here in Princeton, and, more recently, via our web site, confirm my conviction that now, more than ever, people thirst for something "more" than the world of material values and rewards can offer.

I remember the flood of letters we received from all over the country and all parts of the world as a result of our Worldwide Day of Prayer and Meditation to Help Heal Mother Earth, in 1990—an event held in Princeton, keynoted by Thomas Berry and endorsed by the Dalai Lama.

On our trips to the west coast and to the southwest, and our pilgrimages to sacred sites in Ireland and Wales, my wife, Anne, and I met and explored with readers what they would like to read about in the journal. We enriched our own spiritual journey by interviewing and talking with spiritual leaders such as Matt Fox, Eknath Easwaren, and Native Americans. On the east coast, we spent time with

Thich Nhat Hanh, Ram Dass, and Gelek Rinpoche, among others. In Chicago, at the week-long Parliament of the World's Religions, Anne and I, together with Fr. Danny Martin, gave well-attended workshops based on Fellowship in Prayer's belief in the power of prayer and meditation, and Linda Baumann answered questions and handed out copies of the journal at our booth. Back home, Fellowship in Prayer sponsored talks and events by a diversity of spiritual leaders, including Father Robert Kennedy, Zen master, Roman Catholic priest and psychotherapist; Barrett Eagle Bear, a Native American medicine woman who led us through the rigors of the sweat lodge for three days; and "the Khenpos,"two Tibetan monks (Rinpoches, actually) who are Masters of Dzogchen, the highest Tibetan practice of presence of the Divine.

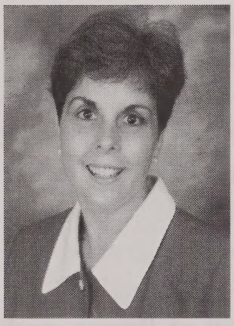
We put together, printed, and sold nearly thirteen thousand copies of our anthology, *The Gift of Prayer,* and more than eight hundred of you attended the two major "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conferences we produced in Princeton in 2000 and 2002. You were lavish in your praise of the dozens of workshops, Taize and Shabbat services, and the sacred sights and sounds of dance, singing, and African drumming that lit up the conferences.

But all that, as Joan Borysenko, one of our keynote speakers, told a rapt audience at the second conference, is in the "No longer." We're in the eternal present, now—and the "Not yet" is hidden in the mists of the future.

My hope and prayer is that the future will bring a steady increase in the numbers of people who place spiritual values above material success, and that many of them will find the encouragement and support they seek in the pages of this journal. It's been a wonderful journey—and my farewell wish is that each and every one of you finds joy, happiness, and peace on your own Sacred Journey toward God.

REBECCA LAIRD/EDITOR

STAY PUT AND STAY HOME



Compassion is not a soft emotion. It demands a hard commitment to stay put and love even when you have every reason to run, to reject, and to protect yourself from pain and suffering.

How do you have compassion when your brother turns out to be a murderer? David Kaczyinski faced this impossible question when his brother, Ted, was implicated in the Unabomber murders. David had every right to disown his brother and let the criminal justice system prevail, but instead, he spent years of his life fighting for his brother's life—not because he felt his brother was innocent—Ted was guilty—but because David believed his brother had sacred worth, even when his actions were horrific and his mind was sadly distorted. In this month's *Questions & Answers* Maryanne Hannan interviews David about his on-going work against the death penalty and how his Buddhist practice informs his advocacy for those who have been judged unworthy to continue living.

How do you have compassion for yourself when a child dies too soon? Joni Woelfel describes her grief in "The Empty Nest." She struggles to let go of a hopeful period in her life without descending into inconsolable grief.

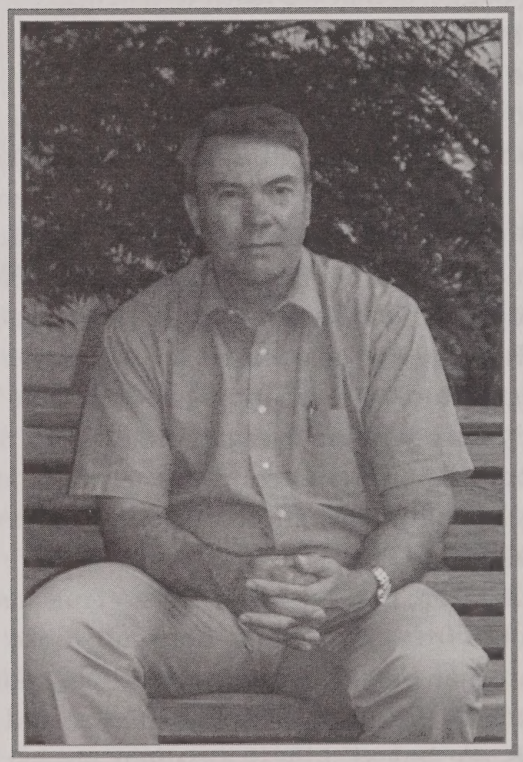
How do you have compassion for your body or the body of another when terrible diseases like multiple sclerosis or HIV/AIDS raise fears and call us all to remember that death and suffering are not just an aberration but are part of being human? Diane Amadeo and Lorraine Murray share their individual stories of facing the hard lessons of physical suffering.

How do you have compassion for the weak? Lenore Baeli Wang suggests that we learn to listen to the "outcast and condemned" and through them we may just "hear God's voice or something close to it."

How do you have compassion for the world? Sister Lou Ella Hickman turns to intercessory prayer. Read about her retreat in our *Pilgrimage* feature. Jean Adams learns, through *A Transforming Experience,* that rather than seeking Truth with a capital "T", the greater way is to seek to live from "deep within myself, the place where Love is." Rick Lewis advocates, in our *Spirituality & Everyday Life* feature, that we must fully "inhabit" the spot we currently occupy. Rather than going out to the world to show compassion, he encourages us to "stay home" and, through meditation, allow our suffering to become "a deep well of life."

Pema Chodron, Buddhist nun, says, "True compassion does not come from wanting to help out those who are less fortunate than ourselves but from realizing our kinship with all beings." We are in this life together and our joys and sorrows are linked. Life is a patient teacher and has many ways of teaching us compassion. The opportunities abound if we will stay put and stay in our deepest spiritual home, when we are tempted to run from suffering. There is no place to go but there is a place to stand where we are not alone.

DAVID KACZYNSKI



An Interview With David Kaczynski

The Kaczynski family came to national attention in April 1996 with the arrest and conviction of Theodore Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber, responsible for a series of mail bombs that killed three people and injured twenty-three others over seventeen years. It was soon leaked that Theodore's brother David, a youth counselor, and David's wife Linda Patrik, a college professor, had approached the FBI with their suspicions about Theodore, thus bringing an end to the violence.

The couple felt betrayed when the U.S. Justice Department broke its promise to keep the family's role in the investigation confidential and again when it sought the death penalty despite Theodore's serious mental illness. David and Linda lobbied tirelessly for nearly two years to prevent the execution of David's brother.

In 1998, David and Linda received a million dollar reward from the Justice Department for their role in the Unabomber investigation, which they subsequently dedicated—minus attorney's fees and taxes—to the victims and their families.

David has given numerous speeches and appeared on several national television shows voicing his opposition to the death penalty. In 1999, David and Linda were honored by the New York State Bar Association with its annual Justice Award—the organization's only presentation to non-lawyers. In July 2001, David was selected after a nationwide search as the new Executive Director of New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty (NYADP)—a statewide organization that unconditionally opposes capital punishment.

Recently Maryanne Hannan sat down with David and interviewed him for Sacred Journey.

Sacred Journey: **What sustained you in the ordeal that began after your brother was identified as the Unabomber?**

David Kaczynski: I don't know if there's a simple answer to that question. I began writing poetry. I went backpacking in the Adirondack woods. I saw a therapist. I also had a job to do, which was to try to save my brother's life by speaking publicly about his mental illness and persuading the Justice Department that the death penalty wasn't appropriate. I proceeded on the assumption that I wasn't entirely helpless in this awful situation. Most importantly, our family—meaning my wife Linda, my mother, and I—drew closer together in our love for one another. There was no blaming. We worried about each other, and for that reason each of us was less consumed than we might have been by personal pain and worry. Growing up, I never questioned my mother and father's love for me. I think that instilled in me a sense of confidence that helped me deal with the nightmare. And throughout the crisis came a steady stream of letters from people we'd never met, some from well-known people like Bishop Howard Hubbard (of Albany, New York), but mostly from strangers, nearly all of them written with kindness and compassion. Many people have to deal with sorrow and loss completely on their own, feeling victimized and cut off from others by violence, illness, poverty, or injustice. We were lucky to have so much support.

How did you come to have your current position?

Since my brother was sentenced to life in prison, I'd been speaking out against the death penalty whenever the opportunity arose. Then one day at my mother's house, I noticed in *The Nation* a classified ad for the position of Executive Director of NYADP. It intrigued me. I discussed my interest with Linda because I was concerned that taking up this cause would make it more difficult to put the

Unabomber episode "behind us" and move on with our lives. But Linda was quite encouraging. She knew how strongly I felt about the death penalty, and we both agreed that healing can best take place when you make an attempt to draw good from the bad. We thought of this as an opportunity to carry a meaningful message to people about violence and its consequences, about responsibility, community, and the desperate need for people to find the best in themselves in response to violence.

Were you always so passionately opposed to the death penalty?

I remember feeling instinctively opposed to the death penalty ever since I was a young adolescent. Before that, like any other kid watching television, I'd cheer when the good guy shot the bad guy. But once, I remember, I saw a movie about a criminal being put to death in the gas chamber and I had a very different feeling. I suppose it was the condemned man's helplessness, the inequality of power, the impassive faces of the witnesses to the execution. I felt a chill and I remember telling myself, "Aw, it's just a movie." Of course, I never imagined then that one day we, my big brother Ted and I, would have a personal, terrifying encounter with capital punishment.

Has it been difficult to make the transition from very private to very public person?

I used to be anxious about speaking in public, but I've grown more comfortable with experience. In general, people respond positively to a personal story sincerely told. It has helped in my own healing and given me hope based on the goodness and decency I see in others. The most difficult part is the need to reflect on the violence, pain, and loss that human beings must struggle with—the aura of pain and tragedy that surrounds the death penalty. There are times when it feels a bit overwhelming.

What does your position involve?

A little bit of everything: speaking to community groups, faith groups, and students; writing articles and media interviews; lobbying the state legislature and municipal governments to pass moratorium resolutions; collaborating with grassroots organizations; coordinating volunteer activity; strategizing with the NYADP Board of Directors, which includes people like Bishop Hubbard, Barbara Shack, and Ronald Tabak who have been working on this issue for many years. Much of my work, especially the administrative work, is rather routine, but some moments feel almost magical. Last spring, for instance, NYADP sponsored a week-long speaking tour of New York State in which a panel of speakers with personal stories related to violence visited high schools, colleges, and churches. Except for gender, we were a diverse group but our paths became intertwined, first as a result of fate and circumstance, but later as a result of our friendships and common values. What opened the door in each case was our willingness to reach out and help one another. The tour seemed a realization of our human connectedness, a suggestion of what's possible when we look beyond our own pain and discover that the pain has meaning.

Your office is headquartered in the Pastoral Center of the Albany diocese and you work closely with Bishop Hubbard. As a practicing Buddhist, do you feel any conflict?

No. NYADP is a secular not-for-profit organization. We've received financial support from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Albany Diocese has donated office space. Bishop Hubbard is President of the Board of Directors, but the other Board members are gathered from various faiths and philosophical perspectives. I've always been struck by Jesus' profound remark, "In my father's house are many mansions." With most faith

traditions rejecting the death penalty, I haven't detected any religious partisanship in the anti-death penalty movement. I believe that people of faith recognize the goodness in each other regardless of ideology or affiliation. I'd like to think that all of the faith traditions ultimately point to the same place of transcendence and hope.

When did you first embrace Buddhism?

I have an old friend in Texas, an Episcopal priest, who recently said to me, "David, I always thought you were a Buddhist." If so, I guess I didn't recognize it myself until 1998 when I "took refuge" as a Buddhist—and then it was to share Linda's Buddhist faith. We had been through so much together that I wanted to share a path of faith that I knew was deeply meaningful to her. Perhaps that's not the best reason. As a result, I'm afraid, I remain far behind Linda with respect to Buddhist study and Buddhist practice. But it does give us a common language to talk about our spiritual yearnings and our life together.

What has been the effect of Buddhism on your personal journey?

In Buddhist teaching, as I understand it, the corollary of Christian forgiveness is experiencing compassion for the person who has harmed you. You recognize that the offender has a basic nature equivalent to the enlightened Buddha, albeit hidden in clouds of ignorance and disturbing emotions. You pity the person his or her lost opportunity to do good and to develop insight. There is a belief that no one in touch with his or her own true nature would do harm. Meanwhile, you are aware as best you can be of your own ignorance and disturbing emotions. So, you try to be mindful of your reactions, hoping to rise above the cycle of ignorance by directing compassion, not hatred, at the person who hurt you. Buddhism concerns itself with practice as much as

theory. In other words, we only get to understand what compassion is by practicing it, and in this life there's never a lack of opportunities.

Given your experiences, isn't it difficult to practice this level of compassion?

In the aftermath of my brother's violence, I was shown so much pain it didn't seem possible to concentrate solely on my own. Everyone was in deep pain—certainly everyone in our family and among the surviving victims. While Ted was the immediate cause of our suffering, I realized that he was desperately ill. I wanted him to suffer less, not more. Several of the victims were very kind to us. It wasn't until the justice system came into play that I felt personally victimized: first, when the FBI broke its promise to keep our role in the investigation confidential, which caused our home to be surrounded by a frenzied media for days; second, when prosecutors sought the death penalty despite the evidence that my brother was mentally ill.

My mom, Linda, and I had to look for what was best in ourselves in order to survive and go on functioning constructively. One day when I was feeling sorry for myself, Linda reminded me that there were other families hurting, probably as much or more than we were. During morning meditation practice, we began meditating with three candles lit to remember the three people my brother had killed. Eventually, we sent letters expressing our sorrow to the victims and their families. Over time, I felt no personal resentment of the system—certainly not toward any of the people involved in it. Those that we had personal dealings with seemed like good people and they all treated us with consideration. I only regret that they gave so much of themselves to a system that needs changing.

How has Buddhism affected your work against the death penalty?

After a few years, I find myself thinking like a Buddhist, and also discovering more connections between Buddhism and Christianity. I find myself practicing "mindfulness" in different ways—before a public talk, while listening to others, while searching for words to express myself. Both Buddhism and Christianity contribute powerfully to a critical analysis of the death penalty, to understanding what is at stake in the complex ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the issue. Buddhism involves a process-oriented approach, a recognition of the obstacles to enlightenment, a trust in one's sincere good intentions, an understanding of a spiritual connectedness among people, a belief that compassion is the key to wisdom, a realization that although we inevitably contribute to the outcome of events, we cannot expect to control them. I find a balanced perspective helpful, particularly when the challenges of working against the death penalty seem rather immense

How do you critique the death penalty?

In general, we're not killing the worst offenders, but those with the worst lawyers. The people executed are almost always poor and disproportionately black. Those executed are not the most cold-blooded and remorseless killers who have committed the most appalling crimes. We are executing the mentally ill, people who were juveniles when they committed murder, and (until recently) the mentally retarded. To say, "after all, we're just executing a few," is like saying that we're indifferent to injustice because it affects only a small and powerless minority. To my mind, the sure sign of a healthy and just community is that it looks out for its weakest members. On a moral level, we can't afford to take a dismissive attitude toward the value of any human life. The value of any life is far beyond our power to estimate. We form impressions and judgments of others (and we must) but ultimate judgment lies beyond us because we lack

definitive insight into the spiritual processes that shape another's life and destiny. As Jesus pointed out, we judge others at our own peril, usually at the expense of our own self-knowledge and humanity.

You mentioned earlier that you were initially sustained by writing poetry and hiking. Do you continue with these activities?

Sure. I've always turned to the creative arts and to nature for insight, inspiration, and healing. Linda and I have a cabin in the desert in west Texas where we try to get away at least once a year to rest and recover. Something about the open spaces, the immensity of the night sky, the rolling land filled with surprising life, the moods of the weather, the striking colors, reminds me that the universe is much greater than any of our narrow interests. A lot of my poems are about the west Texas desert. I love the clarity of the desert, the way I find myself listening there, its layers unfolding in moments of discovery. Poetry gives voice to these moments of discovery.

To some extent, speaking against the death penalty is a similar process, involving complex and sometimes subtle insights. Ultimately, what the death penalty threatens is a truthful understanding of the human condition. Aside from all the cogent and logical arguments against it, the ultimate challenge facing the abolitionist movement is to get people to open their minds, to begin looking at human beings—including those most despised—with a deeper understanding of our shared humanity and its connections to the transcendental and the sacred; to show that when we kill someone in the name of justice, we inevitably lose part of ourselves as well. The truth is a very powerful thing, but even in the best of poems the larger part of it goes unsaid.

All anyone can do, whether in poetry or public advocacy, is to honor it by remaining spiritually open. Poetry attempts to reconcile personal, private experiences with shared

communal experiences. So it represents a work of integration at a profound level. Perhaps that's why many people who have experienced alienation and trauma find poetry so necessary and healing.

I remember reading your poem about the plight of the Tibetan refugees. How has the Dalai Lama's commitment to nonviolent response to the loss of their monastery influenced you?

How do we resist violence without subscribing to a belief system that gives rise to more violence? This is a deep question. The dream of power, in one form or another, is an enduring illusion that has created incredible suffering throughout history. The control we strive for, whether control over our own lives, other people, world events, and even our own thoughts, is always provisional and temporary. The future never meets us in the way we imagine it. Unfortunately, what we often sacrifice to this dream of power is respect for the other, spiritual openness. The ideal of democracy is a powerful antidote to the abuse of power. Our world and even our communities are sharply divided between the powerful and the powerless. I think the powerful have an obligation to remove the blinders of power and open their hearts. The powerless have an even greater challenge to avoid plunging themselves into emotional chaos and self-defeating violence. Though the Dalai Lama's response hasn't succeeded in righting the wrongs done to the Tibetan people, it has avoided violence and inspired people all over the world to demand justice for Tibet. It's given the Dalai Lama's teachings—really, the spiritual treasure of the Tibetan people —an enduring credibility that could not have been achieved through violent means.

An Empty Nest:
A Story of Letting Go

Joni Woelfel

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ~Romans 8:38, 39

When our beloved seventeen-year-old son died unexpectedly, we were stunned, our grief inconsolable. One day, I received an image torn out of a magazine by a friend, depicting a pair of hands reaching toward heaven, cradling an empty nest. Above the nest, being drawn toward a sacred realm of light, was an egg. The image evoked a powerful sense of connection for me. Just weeks prior to our son's death, I had begun working on a second book. Since I anticipated a lot of inner work ahead involving personal incubation,

Joni Woelfel is a regular contributor to Sacred Journey. *She lives in Minnesota. This article is excerpted from* The Light Within: A Woman's Book of Solace, *ACTA Publications and Meditations for Survivors of Suicide, Resurrection Press. Used by permission.*

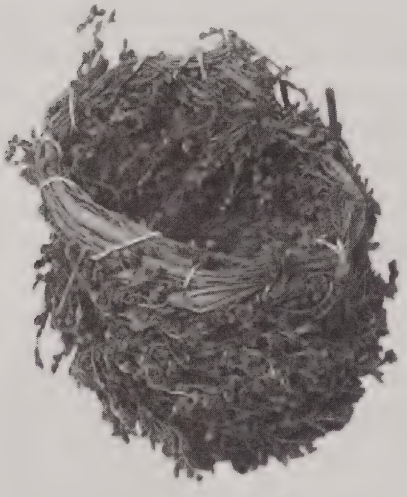
I had placed an egg by my computer as a symbol of this hopeful phase in my life. At the time, I had no way of knowing what that small white egg would come to mean to me.

Following our son's death, I felt many times that I wanted to dash out into the woods and smash the egg against a tree as an expression of the grief and desperation I felt. Somehow, I couldn't do it. The egg is a powerful symbol of new life; in many ancient traditions it represents immortality. But, after four months, my egg was spoiling. I had to decide what to do with it. I took it down to our woods, carrying it carefully in a tiny brass pail. I followed a familiar trail to a place where a creek splashes across a rock-strewn stream bed, just below a beaver dam. This has always been a sacred prayer place for me, overshadowed by what I call The Great Grandmother Trees.

Standing there, I prayed that God would comfort my family, our son's friends, and me in our grief. I spoke at length about the sorrows, despair, horror, the wonder of our lives, the mystery and hope of feeling our son was "gone but not truly gone," all the while clutching the little pail with the egg in it. As I was praying, a giant Great Horned owl flew silently into view, dropping to a large branch of a great grandmother tree, just above me. I could see his round, wide eyes which seemed both solemn and benevolent. As the owl watched, I slipped the egg into the still water at my feet. The egg stayed still for a moment and then gently began to float into the middle of the pool, pulled by the current. I watched, feeling it was important to witness its journey. Then, a surprising thing happened. For no apparent reason, the egg drifted back to me. It occurred to me that *letting go brings love back to us*, in

different and powerful dimensions we only begin to comprehend. The egg paused for a brief moment and, as tears stung my eyes, floated back out into the middle of the creek where it resumed its slow journey downstream.

As I glanced up, the owl lifted silently, his monstrous wings sweeping him from sight. Night had begun to fall and I could barely see as I made my way back through the woods. It seemed to me as if God had sent the owl to agree with me that I was doing the right thing in releasing my son, my sorrow, my dreams and hopes, allowing the stream of life and God's care to surround, enfold, and carry us all. The egg seemed so small and fragile in the stream, I felt very protective of it . . . but I sensed it was time to trust, to let it symbolically go on to where it was meant to go. In the near darkness, the branches of the trees, now bare of leaves were full of empty nests lifted heavenward as if in supplication, like prayers. I felt comforted as I clutched my now empty, little brass pail. With the egg gone, it reminded me poignantly of an empty cocoon or Christ's tomb following resurrection. As gratitude for hope filled me, I knew I could find the courage to go on.



ILLUMINATIONS

Peace will come when every nation is content to shine and to let others shine, when no nation will seek exclusive control for its own program but will allow, indeed will encourage, each nation to develop itself and its particular program for the benefit of its people.

~ *Rabbi Mendell Lewittes*

Misfortune teaches us to pray.

~ *Slovakian proverb*

It is a great relief when, for a few moments in the day, we can retire to our chamber and be completely true to ourselves. It leavens the rest of our hours.

~ *Henry David Thoreau,* Walden

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.

~ *Edgar A. Guest*

When you get to be older and the concerns of the day have all been attended to and you turn to the inner life . . . Well, if you don't know where it is, you'll be sorry.

~ *Joseph Campbell*

Courage is not the towering oak that sees storms come and go; it is the fragile blossom that opens in the snow.

~*Alice Mackenzie Swain*

An Intercessory Retreat

Lou Ella Hickman

William Blake's famous lines: "For Mercy has a human heart,/Pity, a human face . . .," summarized a retreat I had long wanted to make—a week of intercessory prayer. My desire began a number of years ago when several sisters and I organized two separate all-night vigils. A friend brought her guitar, original music; we supplied the chapel and refreshments to keep us awake. Prior to the festivities, we posted a prayer list on the chapel door. Eight hours, and as many rosaries later, we ended the vigils with our community Mass.

I suppose the music must have seeded this desire for more. The world was our project, and mercy was our lever to move it. My protestant side seemed to soar with music in the ceiling of our small chapel. Yet it was my Catholicism that ate up the night with rosary after rosary and the mercy chaplet. Or maybe it was the silence that truly spoke to my heart. Silence and the Blessed Sacrament at 3 A.M. was more music than any hymn.

This summer I arrived a day early in Houston to attend a preached retreat at a nearby convent. One of my community sisters, Sister Beatrice, offered to take me in

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S., is a Sister of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament from Corpus Christi, Texas. *Reprinted with permission.*

as there was no more space available at the convent. Taking my bags to the guest portion of the house, I noticed immediately the chapel was next to my room. I would sleep next to Presence. That evening Sister Bea asked me to pray for a young man. His mother had called earlier that afternoon, needing to talk. The idea struck—"Here's your chance for that week-long retreat of intercessory prayer you've wanted. Go for it." I cancelled my plans.

The next morning I brought in one of the bigger chairs from the living room to the chapel. I breathed a long sigh of relief as I became aware of the muffled traffic outside. With a chair, prayer books, and the Eucharist, I could begin to befriend the invisible of this aching world.

With a chair, prayer books, and the Eucharist, I could begin to befriend the invisible . . .

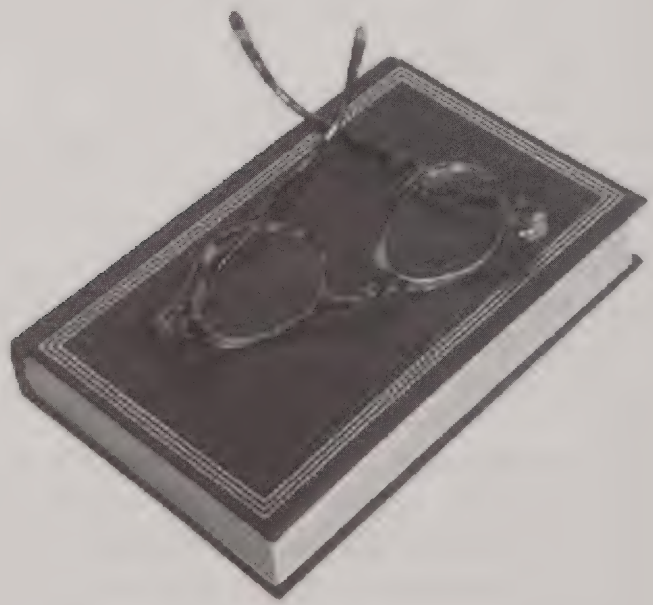
I felt cradled in the big chair. My journal seemed to stare back at me with its single white eye of a page. Here my invisible guests would take on reality. Each would have a name. The faceless would be embraced and honored even if just on a piece of paper. For each of the following days, I wrote a list of names, and with each day my formal prayers slipped more and more into just sitting. "Just sit with it," my spiritual director used to advise me when I felt nothing or felt something too deep for words. So I sat. The silence would tell me everything.

Between my long sittings, I did go out. Sister Bea's feet were as painful to see as they were to the touch. Just two weeks after her surgery, she and her feet still needed a little help. The practical gave a way to prayer in action. Yet I was also aware of those lists still on the altar. They

were like small votive candles flickering in the hand of the Unseen.

One day mercy did come. The silence did speak. Yet even now only two words are adequate to touch its mystery—spiritual loneliness. This mercy was not what I had expected. There was no music, no formal prayers. There was only the silence and in it the world and its great need of friendship. There were only slow, hot tears.

"How was your retreat?" greeted me on my return to the motherhouse. "Just wonderful," I replied. But how could I describe the silence? How could I describe a world so full of need? I have pondered again and again the lines of the psalmist, "Delight in the Lord and the Lord will give you the desires of your heart." How simply amazing in a world so full of need!



When All Has Been Written, Thank You

Diana M. Amadeo

Sleep; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon, If sweet, give thanks . . . to give thanks is good and to forgive.
~Ave Atque Vale 1878

Sometimes I wonder if before I was born I was asked about the kind of life I would live. I think I may have replied, "Don't make it boring." As a result, my life has been an adventure of breathless action, twists and turns, challenging developments, comedy and tragedy. Multiple sclerosis was a perfect element to ensure that life would never be boring.

I love my novel life. Each carefully placed word has contributed in the unfolding of this divine mystery. The cast of characters include a wonderful husband and three happy, healthy children. What a rich, never-ending series of subplots that the heavenly author of my life has allowed. There have been the dark times as well as the

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light. Early chapters of pain, heartache, sorrow, and later additions of joy, happiness, and peace have offered a very unique time experience.

Dissecting the building paragraphs of my life's story reveals an awesome revelation. Whereas the Author supplies the outline, personal response to content determines life's outcome. Imagine, my choices made during routine, crisis, and challenge help to determine my destiny. What a responsibility! This insight leaves me in wonder. How will the final manuscript read? Will my response to dramatic elements be sinful or saintly? Will I be able to cope with the inevitable conflict, tension, and surprise? Fortunately, my script shows that after a dramatic cliffhanger I graciously allowed space to catch my breath. Rebuilding times of adjustment, fresh starts, new beginnings are the true page turners of life.

Yet glancing through life's narrative seems almost surreal. The story line, characters, hooks, and compelling dialogue seem familiar, but the protagonist must be someone else. She seems much different than me, now. Flashback shows that all remains well during the decades of puzzling minor physical symptoms that come and go as MS stayed its benign course. But then . . .

One dark and mysterious night a major exacerbation brings years of humoring the body's demands to a crashing halt. The disease will no longer be denied. A good sleuth armed with MRI, spinal fluid analysis, countless blood draws and neurological studies confirms the disease's progression. But the story does not end with diagnosis, it only begins. For the protagonist must now contend with visual, speech, hearing, cognitive, and motor impairment of varying degrees.

Determination and several promising comebacks are deceiving to our fair damsel in distress. Soon, running for fitness is replaced by weakness and immobility; energetic activity with profound fatigue: articulate diction replaced by monosyllabic nonsense, quick wit with amnesia, 20/20 eyesight with blurred and occasional double vision; and a young pain-free body prematurely aged with intense muscle spasms and neuropathy. The protection of denial collapses, reality sets in. Life as she has known it will never be the same. In devastation, she admits defeat and ends twenty years as a registered nurse for others. Now principal care would be herself. Self esteem plummets. She hits rock bottom. All is lost. Or is it?

Physical disability, although the most visible component to her malady, seems to be the least worrisome. A myriad of horrifying emotions move in. Merciless guilt thickens the plot. Guilt that she is now a burden to her family. Guilt that she could perform better now if she would only push herself more. And more and more. There is sadness for the inevitable loss of friendships, sadness from the looks of curiosity and pity when she struggles to find her new and ever changing "normal." And there is anger from the speculation and rumor of others who don't understand or accept her changes. She sinks further into the muck and mire of confusion, fear, anger, and depression. So many losses. So much negativity from outside and within. Lots of self pity. It is too much to handle alone. Her family shares her exhaustion. Who can she turn to? Who could possibly care?

On her knees she falls. She sobs and begs for help. She is humbled more than anyone could ever know. Except the One who knows all. Slowly, peace comes. She becomes still and hears a voice.

"I love you. I am with you always."

Research reveals that every case of multiple sclerosis is different. Symptoms vary in intensity by degree of brain and spinal cord insult. Each person deals with MS in their own way as uniquely as the placement of their lesions.

I have been graced with a primary physician and neurologist who respect the symmetry of mind, body, spirit and soul. My doctors are cast players who manage, guide, support, and coordinate my physical care. My family nourishes the spirit. Constant input in this information age satisfies the mind. But what has been most beneficial in finding peace, moving on with life and living it to the fullest is filling my soul.

Minding the soul plays an essential role in any drama. When my story line lost its focus, I was offered enlightened spiritual advisors who assisted this lost soul to find its way, again. Gentle spiritual guidance assisted inner healing of present and past traumas, and lent hope when all seemed dark ahead. Trust and inner peace also build through personal prayer and meditation. Oftentimes when life seems hopeless, the Author presents avenues to nourish and strengthen the soul. For me, solace came through spiritual study, choosing to live simply and eliminating unnecessary distractions, being open to the assistance of others, religious observance, and a personal favorite—outreach to those less fortunate. No matter how incapacitated the subject, there is always someone in more dire straits. Everyone has a personal book. Some stories cry for respite.

This exhilarating, frustrating, captivating Book of Life has been filled with countless red herrings, fascinating characters, devastating pain and anguish, interesting developments, incredible insights, and countless blessings. My rough draft to wellness has necessitated many

rewrites. Yet, I trust . . . and continue.

Every well-developed plot needs an antagonist. In this case, the beast just happens to be disease. There's nothing wrong with an honest fight with an adversary. Combating disease is essential. Hope should never be abandoned as we search for a cure. Struggling to maintain a form of physical prowess is imperative to keep the body in optimal form. But battle fatigue is very real. And there is more meaning to existence than war and conflict. Life need not be one continuous trauma. Sometimes stories beg for comic relief, or better yet, peace and understanding. Most often this is found in the acceptance of the conditions of life. Acceptance is sometimes the greatest healing of all.

My book of life involved careful turning of the pages in my heart. It guided me to meditation and listening closely within to hear whispers of love, guidance, and encouragement. It reminded me that we are all creatures with values far greater than our imperfect bodies. These later chapters have paradoxically revealed that compassion and service toward others lessen the devastation of MS to my psyche. And if physical impairment leaves me unable to lend a hand, prayer for others and their intentions can positively affect another's destiny, and enhance and lend meaning to my own.

This is just one life story. The plot, sequence, structure and pace have guided my character development. Perhaps after several more climactic developments, I will be given a satisfactory conclusion in heavenly repose. The epilogue promises to be gentle and compassionate.

And the sequel involves the release of an unencumbered free spirit.

[Though My Petition Is]

Chet Corey

Though my petition is
as irritating as a smoldering wick,
O Lord,
you will not quench,
nor the bruised reed of my spirit
break.

Though my knock
is nothing to the knuckle rap
of the window's in the parable
nor of Monica's persistence
in a sinful Augustine's need,
open your sanctuary,
sequester me within your answer.

Chet Corey is a Covenant Affiliate of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (LaCrosse, WI) A short story appears in the current issue of Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature. *A grouping of five of his poems appears in* Writing the Wave, *an anthology of fiction, nonfiction and poetry winners of the 1999 Lake Superior Writer's Contest.*

Though I come
as though a stranger,
hostel me in the monastery
of your ways;
for I am without
& in need of being within.
Answer me,
though I know not what I ask.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

The Dream

Jean Adams

It was ten years ago, 1988. I had been studying *A Course In Miracles* for four years, knowing it offered the guidance I wanted on my spiritual path, yet feeling that I was no wiser than when I began. My life was not reflecting positive changes. I was in a stuck place, frustrated in an attempt to understand every sentence in the Course, approaching it from an intellectual level. My unanswerable question was, "What is truth, and where is it to be found?"

Then I had a dream which provided a turning point in my life.

In dreams I usually cannot read any words that might appear. Letters have strange shapes and words become a jumble, changing with each attempt to read them. In this dream I came upon a message in a deep forest. A paper was lying on the ground and, knowing this was a dream, I was sad to think I would be unable to read it, though it

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was clearly meant for me. But to my surprise, as I picked up the paper and looked at it, the letters didn't dance, and the words held still. This is what I read:

> *Beloved Seeker: Once the search for the Highest Truth becomes the search for Greatest Love, God's love will manifest in your life more and more.*

I awoke and wrote it down, so I know the message was something real, the dream lucid.

This is what the message meant to me: Truth is God and God is Love; God cannot be found through the intellect, but in the heart/mind. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom, and wisdom is not attained by *trying*. I was being called to live less in my head and more in my heart. "Beloved," the message said; that meant *I am beloved*! And where did the message come from? It came from deep within myself, the place where Love is; where the Beloved and God are the same. The truth is that I am living in God and God is living in me; how could my life not reflect that love?

So I gave up trying so hard and thinking too much, and began a deeper practice of meditation and living the Course. *A Course in Miracles* still leads my way; and as a question or confusion arises I remind myself to give it to the Answerer of all questions, who lives where love knows all. In my heart.

Turning Doris

Lorraine V. Murray

A woman is hidden behind the white shower curtain. Judging by the sounds, I assume she is soaping herself.

Today's my first day volunteering inside the home known as the Gift of Grace, where homeless women with AIDS are cared for by Mother Teresa's nuns and volunteers.

When I arrived earlier this morning, I was handed a broom by Lily, an experienced volunteer with freckles embroidering her dark cheeks. I explained to her that I want to start out doing housework and eventually try my hand at patient care.

It's not that I'm afraid of getting AIDS," I said, "It's just that I'm a bit clumsy and haven't ministered to very ill people." She nodded compassionately.

It's taken a few years to pick up this broom. When Mother Teresa first sent her nuns to Atlanta, my husband and I helped them renovate a dilapidated house that

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eventually became the Gift of Grace. Over the years, I've taken the more able-bodied residents shopping. I came here this morning to do housecleaning, but since one of the nuns asked me to help the woman in the shower, I've put down my broom and taken up my post in the bathroom.

Suddenly the woman draws back the curtain. There she is, emaciated, naked, and trembling, holding on for dear life to a wall rack. She's waiting for me to do something, I realize. When I hesitate, she asks, "Would you dry my back?"

I grab a nearby towel and begin, rather gingerly, to dry her back. Thoughts fill my mind like birds darkening a sky. When my mother was dying from cancer more than 20 years ago, I was not there to help her as she plummeted into the final stages. Instead, I was in college 300 miles away and in denial about the seriousness of her illness.

I've never dried the back of another woman. I've never seen a black woman naked. It's been years since I towel-dried a baby. My gestures seem oddly clumsy. After all, I've never touched a person who is dying.

I'm wearing protective gloves this morning, but, still, some deep wellspring of fear seems to exist in my soul that my rational mind can't quite overcome. I feel this fear strongly as the towel moves downward toward the woman's rump, her thighs, her legs.

Even though we've only been working together for a half hour, I've already gleaned important shreds of information from Lily. She's a massage therapist. She's a mother. She cared for her own mother before her death. Lily makes you feel you can lean on her in an emergency.

So when the woman in the shower asks me for help putting on a diaper, I know just what to do. I call for Lily.

I don't bore her with all the excuses that rush to my

mind—how it's been years since I've diapered a baby and I can barely remember that procedure, let alone figure out how to diaper an adult. I don't mention the fear that keeps bubbling upwards from some deep, unknown part of me.

She rescues me cheerfully. One, two, three, the diaper is on. Next she gives the woman enough support to step out of the shower and into a wheelchair. Naked except for the pale blue diaper, the woman seems to radiate light as she settles into the chair.

Her hair is wreathed in velcro hair rollers. Around her neck she wears sparkling, icy blue Rosary beads and shiny medals of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I feel like genuflecting before her. Instead, I return her big smile and compliment her on the pale blue sweatshirt that Lily is gently fitting over her head.

It's at this moment that a small Indian nun wearing the familiar blue-and-white sari of Mother Teresa's order appears in the hall. She flashes us a big crescent of a smile.

"Good morning, how are you today?" she asks in a voice thick with the cadences of India. "I'm alive, thanks be to God," proclaims the woman with an even bigger smile.

Now Sister turns to me.

"Lorraine, will you help me turn Doris over in bed?" Lily told me earlier that Doris—"rigid as a board"—is in the last stages of AIDS.

All I can think is: "Oh, God, I'm not ready. I came here today to sweep." The words that spill from my mouth are simple: "Sister, I'm not ready."

Sister is unfazed. No doubt she's seen my reaction hundreds of times. "It's okay," she says and then rushes off.

So I've missed my chance this morning to learn something important. Not just how to turn someone in

bed but also how to confront my horror of this disease—and of death. I realize this in a flash.

I take the broom and start going from room to room, with Lily not far behind, toting a big bucket of water and a mop.

In one of the rooms a black cheery woman in her sixties is making her bed. She smiles with slightly oversized false teeth and points lovingly to a photo of a tiny girl decked out in a ruffly pink dress. "My granchile," she says proudly, and I remark at the loveliness of the child. Then the woman grows serious.

"Sister want me to move down the hall to another room," she says. "But I don't want to. Four people's died in that room. It ain't that I'm afraid of death, no, I'm just afraid of that room."

As I continue sweeping, I realize this woman has cut to the chase. Am I afraid of getting AIDS and dying or am I afraid of death in general—or what? Is the woman fooling herself about her feelings about that room? Am I deluding myself about my fears?

My reflections don't simmer very long. From room to room I go, sweeping, sweeping, sweeping. Soon I'm in Doris' room. She is so still and small beneath the covers with just a tiny bit of her head showing. She reminds me of a dry leaf that the slightest breeze might lift away.

Carefully, I sweep around her bed, praying for her as I do, praying that her death won't be too agonizing. And I pray for myself too: "Oh Lord, help me to get to the point where I can say "yes" to turning Doris. Give me another chance."

The next day at Mass the priest mentions Jesus' words in Matthew: "I was in prison and you visited me. I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave

me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me." (Matthew 26: 35-36)

The heart of Christianity is conveyed in this passage, which was Mother Teresa's favorite.

Of course, now I have to face it. In refusing to turn Doris, I turned my back on Christ.

But Peter was given a second chance after he denied knowing Jesus. And I recall a passage from "The Song of the Bird" by Anthony deMello:

> I had a fairly good relationship with the Lord . . . But always I had this uncomfortable feeling that he wanted me to look at him. And I would not. I would talk, but look away when I sensed he was looking at me. I was afraid. I should find an accusation there of some unrepented sin . . . . One day I finally summoned up the courage and looked! There was no accusation. There was no demand. The eyes just said, 'I love you.' And I walked out and, like Peter, I wept.
>
> "Song of the Bird," Doubleday, 1982, p. 113-114

I acknowledge how much I missed by not tending to Doris. I realize my fears are holding me back. But I also believe that I'll be given a second, a third, even a fourth chance.

Doris died a week ago. She was tenderly cared for by the sisters and volunteers to the very end. Although I never got a chance to help her, still I learned an invaluable lesson from her.

My prayer is that next time Sister asks me to help a patient like Doris, I'll be like the disciples who saw Jesus walking on the water.

At first they were terrified.

But they overcame their fear when He said: "It is I. Do not be afraid." (John 6, 20)

Voices in the Wilderness

Lenore Baeli Wang

When people talk of hearing "voices" we think, "schizophrenia," or maybe, "auditory hallucinations." But perhaps many people actually are "voices" conveying words of wisdom from unseen or unexpected sources. If we immediately dismiss what such individuals have to communicate, valuable meaning may be lost. If Pulitzer-prize-winning author Robert Coles had not taken to heart Anna Freud's words, "Our patients are our professors!" we might not have been fortunate enough to hear what he heard, particularly in his spiritually insightful book, *The Spiritual Life of Children*.

Everyone has prejudices to overcome. We often value the information we gain from some sources and disregard what we hear from others. Robert Coles berates himself for not expecting the spiritual insights he received from the children he interviewed, particularly those who

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"attended schools lacking in so many respects. . . At times, I must admit," he says, "I've regarded them as blameless victims of the excesses of mass culture—television, the movies, rock music." Even the most sophisticated and creative psychiatrist can slip into subtle prejudices capable of blocking the mind's ear. Coles, fortunately, did not let that continue.

In the closing pages of his book, Coles quotes a ten-year-old girl best described by the qualities that initially prejudiced him. Before she tells her story of helping a lost old woman find her way through the city to her daughter's house, the girl says this: "I look forward to getting all grown up, and then, maybe, someday, I'll get a few whispers from God! My aunt says she prays so hard, she hears God's answer. I've never heard Him, but maybe He'll tell me something. You don't have to hear Him—just pray, He gets you on the right track."

What this child says at the end of her narrative is astonishingly uplifting.

> I said good-bye to her [the old woman], and she said thank you so many times I thought she'd never stop! She grabbed my arm, and she said God sent me to her, and she'd pray to Him later . . . to thank Him . . . for having me be there. . . . I wasn't sure, at first, she was serious. But I looked at her, and she had tears in her eyes, so I know she was. . . . Maybe God puts you here and He gives you these hints of what's ahead, and you should pay attention to them, because that's Him speaking to you.

There are probably more unexpected sources than we can ever be aware of at any given moment.

Sophistication can block our ears. "Thank God I'm not like that sinner over there" is a superb way to close our minds to not only our sins, but to whatever words of wisdom that "sinner over there" might have to offer.

We cannot even begin to listen if we are not at first prepared to hear. And we will not be prepared to hear some individuals if our ears are filled up with *only* the negative judgment of their criminal or mental status.

Some people don't care about a word or idea that Martin Luther King, Jr. or John F. Kennedy had to say because of the affairs they were known to have with women.

I once prepared to ignore Gandhi's message because I discovered that he beat his wife. Actions speak louder than words regarding character, but this is not to say that imperfect characters cannot ever spout true or good words.

. . .We just might hear God's voice, or something close to it.

Paradoxically, it is those who are spiritually weak or young who need to be heard. How can we even begin to help without listening first? Perhaps this is what "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matt. 25:35) is about. We give, we receive. The two are often intertwined in religious experience.

This does not have to be a mindless, open-to-everything brand of listening, nor a belief that God speaks through everyone. But sometimes a wisdom inspired by God or godliness can be found or heard in unexpected situations. It is possible now, as the New Testament reads, citing the Old: "So, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Heb. 3:7)

An image for these voices in the wilderness can be found in Acts 2:3 when the Holy Spirit descends on the day of Pentecost. "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them (NIV). We're mostly familiar with the fact that those receiving the blessings were then able, as the Bible says, to "speak in other tongues." Often overlooked is the coincidentally tongue-like shape of the flames that descended over everyone's head. Fire is not necessarily a comfortable element, particularly when we come too close to it. That's why the image described in Acts 2:3 is one that reminds me of the masses of people anywhere in the world, waiting, needing, to be heard. A billion flames like tongues, flickering, possibly conveying words, ideas that might hurt us to attend to, but might be nonetheless worth hearing.

In *The Dinosaur Man*, psychologist Susan Baur writes of her painful yet hope-affirming encounters with a severely schizophrenic man who believed he was a dinosaur. After they had become friends, Baur had to leave for a while. When she returned to see how he was doing, they had the following conversation.

> "My mind has been irrelevant since you left. I forgot you. I forgot everything you said to me."
>
> "Everything?"
>
> "Everything," he repeated, "except the words of love."

The dinosaur man, despite his incredible mental handicaps, was capable of both hearing and speaking "words of love." In spite of him, and many others for whom our high tech, fast-paced, sophisticated society

finds little time and good reason not to hear or listen to, many words of love or hope will go unheard, if not unspoken altogether. If all of humanity always followed its natural instinct not to listen to the words of the outcast and the condemned, the greatest voice of all would not have been heard and set down for our edification today. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" could also be expressed, circularly: If we do not harden our hearts, we just might hear God's voice, or something close to it.

Along My Path

Kenneth D. Smith

Along my path,
And in my silence:
An under-utter
Of urges
And dirges
And longings
And songs waiting to be sung
And there
Up there
A chorus of church bells waiting to be rung
Not to call the congregation
Not to signal adulation
Of some distant father god,
But to call me back into the silence.

So I quietly walk
Along my path
And feel
The urges
And dirges
And longings
Ignite my heart
And set my soul ablaze.

I Am

Tama Lyn Hughes

I am!
That much I know.
I am what?
I am—God!
I am God
in expression!
What a grand thought—
What a grand realization!

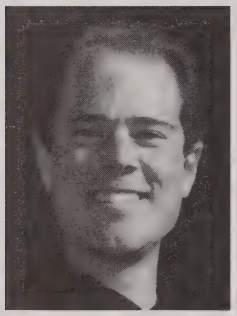
I am God
in expression
as one teeny weeny speck
in the allness
that God is.
I am God
because there is nothing else!
And what is God?
Only Life . . . .
the essence of all that is.
The moving beingness of everything—
the giant allness that's too big,
too much, to realize or describe!
But I have a grand thrilling feelingness
of being part of it . . . .
That's what I am!

Kenneth D. Smith participates in weekend meditation retreats at the NY Shambhala Center and is studying spiritual warriorship training based on the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa.

Tama Lyn Hughes is a longtime subscriber to Sacred Journey *and at age eighty-four continues to write, sharing her knowledge and understanding with as many people as she can. She lives in New Mexico.*

How to be Found

Rick Lewis



If you've ever been in a busy shopping center with a friend, you may have experienced the frustration of trying to reunite after getting unintentionally separated. Both parties, having lost their partner, are faced with a dilemma: Do I look all over the shopping mall for my friend, or sit in one place and trust that when he/she realizes we've become separated he/she will come looking for me?

Given that the mall has limits, regardless of its size, if one person stays in one place while the other does the looking, the "lost one" will eventually be found, even if the "seeker" has to look everywhere else first.

Now expand this dynamic to the level of the entire universe. We have become separated from the divine—from ourselves in the form of our "true nature" or reality. Even in the shopping mall, if both parties are actively

Rick Lewis is the author of You Have the Right to Remain Silent: Bringing Meditation to Life. *This article is excerpted from pages 23-26 of his book* *© 2002 Richard Charles Lewis. Used by permission of Hohm Press (www.hohmpress.com).*

looking for each other, the possibility exists of never finding each other again. But given the entire universe, if we and the divine are looking for each other, the chances of our meeting up on some street corner are astoundingly remote. For this reason the spiritual path has a "golden rule" which is meant to streamline this process of our reconnection.

It is the divine that does the looking. Not us.

Kaya sadhana is the science of how to stay in one place in the shopping center after we get separated from our natural state. It's the science of being where we're supposed to be when the divine comes to look for us; that is, rooted in, anchored in and tethered to ordinary human embodiment, not distracted, dissociated, entertained, pleasured, or numbed away from that embodiment. Our culture is unaware of this principle, however. We're out there searching in a million ways, "looking for love in all the wrong faces, looking for love in too many places," as the song goes; not at home; weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth, when all the while the divine has been to our house fifty times in the last three weeks, but we weren't there. We were out looking for it.

Here in This Body

This is literally what we are doing. The very dynamic of our attention being elsewhere, and not just here in this body, makes it impossible for the divine to find us. A book that Osho Rajneesh put out a long time ago features the title, *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There.* That title describes precisely what the discipline of meditation is about: developing the art of staying home.

Out of habit we spread ourselves thin, stretching horizontally, trying to cover all the bases, reach all the destinations available to us—amassing frequent flyer points for ever more exploration. But that exploration is one-dimensional until we allow ourselves to drop within and to discover a deep well of life that we have been sitting on all along. To stay home is to explore ourselves as depth, not just as the lure to ever-new horizons.

Meditation is the practice of giving all our weight to the spot we currently occupy, to inhabit it with the full measure of our gravity. Our beliefs and ideas about ourselves are an artificial floor which cannot hold up beneath the full weight of our presence. If we allow that presence, that floor inevitably gives direct relationship to ourselves, unmediated by the middleman of self-image and the protection of that image.

There is one possible outcome of breaking through to the territories of reality, and that is suffering. Most of our so-called search for love is based on a life that we are running from: the life that happened to us when we were children. We hope that we can find a different life without having to go back to the pain of the past, but the key to our future growth has been left behind, buried at the bottom of that heap of fear, anguish and sorrow. When we agree to stay home and to accept an intimate relationship to ourselves, we take responsibility for all the experiences and the circumstances that we've been trying to avoid. We agree to a relationship to all that we wanted to wall out, and the result of that relating is *feeling*—feeling which will come to us, in part, as suffering.

Meditation is the posture in which we can bear this suffering and transmute it into an expansive context. Suffering borne in a posture of denial or contraction is

like a scream in an echo chamber; there is nothing to help us absorb its magnitude. Suffering held in the context of meditation is like a cry in the woods—that pain is heard by the nature of life itself; there is an abundance of natural law present to bear witness to the cry, and that witness is tremendously nurturing. Instead of echoing back at us, the pain is received and grounded.

In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Suzuki Roshi, one of the forefathers of American Zen, says, "in the zazen posture, your mind and body have great power to accept things as they are, whether agreeable or disagreeable."

Just like that, there is ninety-nine percent of the path that we [no] longer have to worry about. We don't have to understand anything other than how to practice the one percent. When we become responsible for the practice of staying home in the body, the glory of spiritual life unfolds naturally, guided by the creative intelligence of the divine itself, which happily carries us and moves us once it discovers that we are doing our part—that we have learned how to be present and to relax into the arms of real help.

This coming holiday season
give your loved ones and friends
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